

Faith Based and Community Initiatives



USDA
National
Farm to
School
Program

United States
Department of
Agriculture

Stone Soup Fresno Cultural Community Center

The Summer Food Service Program

Story of Success.

Jenny Her, age 11, and Christie Vang, age 10, are friends and extended family who attend summer lunch at Stone Soup together everyday. Their parents were among the first waves of refugees to arrive from Laos, via Thailand and have made California their home for many years. Both girls are members of large families; Jenny is one of 9 children, and Christie is one of 10. Family has a special status in the Hmong culture, and large families are not uncommon. In poor economic times however, this stretches resources thinly. Poverty and unemployment are common among many families in the Fresno area, including those of the Hmong. Stone Soup provides physical and cultural nourishment for the girls and their peers in Fresno.

Both girls enjoy the Cultural Academy at Stone Soup Fresno Cultural Community Center where they learn traditional Hmong dances and how to read and write Hmong. Learning how to read and write the language they first learned as infants is not only a valuable cultural influence but is also practical. Kathleen Garabed, founder of Stone Soup, shared that studies indicate that children who are literate in their first language are often more successful in schools where another language is primarily spoken. Jenny and Christie don't plan to stop at becoming proficient in Hmong and English; both girls plan to study Spanish next school year. They both enjoy school a great deal, not only for the opportunity to socially interact and see their friends, but also because they enjoy learning.

Lunch time at Stone Soup is a special time. Jenny and Christie like the lunches and appreciate the time and opportunity to visit with their friends and family. Jenny and Christie's mothers work at home, tending to their homes and large families. Jenny's father works for the Fresno Unified School District and Christie's father is a farmer. Stone Soup provides both families with an enjoyable summer experience, knowing their children have a safe environment where they receive a nutrition meal and learn about their culture and heritage.

How the Initiative is Helping.

Stone Soup offers several services to the Hmong community. Many of the Hmong families have large families and struggle with food insecurity. For the Hmong children, Stone Soup offers educational and cultural enrichment services. To complement their educational and cultural services, in 2004 Stone Soup decided to offer summer lunches to the children to ensure they received nutritious meals during the summer months.



As part of the President's Faith-Based and Community Initiative, the Western Region Special Nutrition Program staff has been working to expand summer meal service with faith, and community organizations in the greater Fresno area. Garabed learned about the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) through faith and community-based organizations in the Fresno area. Garabed contacted staff of the California Department of Education assigned to Fresno and, in 2004 Stone Soup participated as its own SFSP sponsor. In 2005, Garabed decided that if Stone Soup left the administrative part of SFSP operations to another organization, Stone Soup could dedicate more time to its own programs. Garabed and her staff are pleased to provide nutritious meals to children during the school summer vacation through the SFSP while their sponsor, the Fresno County Equal Opportunity Commission, handles the administrative responsibilities of the meal program.

The Organization.

Stone Soup Fresno Cultural Community Center serves the Hmong community in Fresno, CA. The Hmong are an Asian ethnic group which is believed to have originated in China and began migrating in the late 17th century throughout Laos, Vietnam, and Thailand. Their language and culture are distinct and unique, although both bear some resemblance to other Asian languages and agrarian cultures. During the course of the Vietnam War, Hmong living in Laos played a critical role in the U.S. attempt to defeat the Northern Vietnamese army and its sympathizers in Laos. After the departure of the U.S. forces, the Hmong were persecuted for assisting the U.S. In 1976, the U.S. and other countries around the world began accepting Laotian Hmong refugees. The U.S. has continued to accept Hmong refugees since 1976, with a final refugee group due to arrive in the U.S. in July 2005.

Mission.

The mission of the Stone Soup Fresno Cultural Community Center is to share their gifts and talents to build a better community.

With the support of the U.S. State Department and local social service agencies, most of the early adult Hmong refugees adjusted well to life in the U.S. However, as the children of the Hmong grew older, they began to get in trouble in the community and school. Kathy Garabed, who had worked extensively with the Hmong refugees as a relocation officer, concluded that the Hmong youth need a stronger constructive cultural influence to help them develop a positive identity in those critical formative adolescent years. This eventually led Garabed to found the Stone Soup Fresno Cultural Community Center.

Services Offered.

- **Health:** free medical and dental services for those without insurance, family planning services, health education, preventive health screenings
- **Education:** pre-school, after school enrichment, parent education, issues conferences
- **Culture:** cultural preservation, instruction in traditional art forms, cultural ceremonies and literacy, culturally sensitivity and cultural competency training
- **Civic Engagement:** leadership training, advocacy, citizenship assistance, entrepreneurial training

Contact.

Address:

1345 East Bulldog Lane Suite 4
Fresno, CA 93710

Phone:

(559) 224-7613

Executive Director:

Ms. Kathleen Garabed

Site Director and Contacts:

Ms. Kathleen Garabed

Ms. Laddavone Mekdara